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EDITORIAL COMMENT

IF the all-night queue outside Covent Garden the evening before the box office opened for the August "American repertoire" season of Sadler's Wells Ballet is anything to go by, then these four weeks now drawing to a close have been the greatest success to date. The changes of cast, some of them of a radical nature, were the subject of eager discussion beforehand and will certainly have been the occasion for excited argument during the season. There is no doubt at all that the decision of the directors to show English audiences a preview of what America will be seeing in the autumn has been enormously appreciated, for we now feel that we can share a little more actively in the coming testing time of our well-loved Ballet. But amidst the general acclamation a few small voices must be forgiven if they are raised to enquire why what has been good enough for an intensely loyal public here for a number of years has suddenly been discovered to be not good enough to go overseas? Is the best in English Ballet to be "for export only" while we poor natives are expected to be grateful for the utility article? Naturally we are only too anxious that America and Canada should see the very best that we can do, but surely the money that ballet lovers here continue to pour into the Royal Opera House box office entitles them to a similar consideration. When Sadler's Wells Ballet return on Boxing Day (and what a welcome will await them!) they will be dancing only four times a week. This should not put so much of a strain even on the principals that we cannot continue to have the finest possible casting in every ballet.

From all one hears from America Sadler's Wells is assured of a "sell out" long before the New York season begins. People are travelling thousands of miles to see them (I have heard of parties flying from as far as San Francisco). If the love and good wishes which will accompany them were measurable by weight, the 'planes in which they are to fly to New York would never be able to leave the ground.

Ballet Today's critic, Mary Clarke, will be in New York for at any rate the first week of the season so that in addition to the American report we shall hear what an Englishwoman, sitting amongst a strange audience, felt about the reaction to our dancers and their ballets.

The Spanish colony in London cannot complain that they have been neglected. Ana Esmeralda, who had a three week season with her *Spanish Rhapsody* at the Savoy Theatre commencing June 8th, was our third visitor within a few months. Opinions varied considerably about Esmeralda, her supporting company and the show in general. I felt that it was an entertaining and well-presented programme and that Esmeralda came somewhere between Amaya and Mariemma, neither as wild as the one nor as tame as the other. The number I liked most was her *Carmen and the Bullfighters* which she danced with four men whose quiet stepping and movements with their hats had a strangely sinister quality. People I spoke to who have some knowledge of the various styles and traditions of Spanish dancing seemed sharply divided in opinion as to whether the dances were neither very good nor very authentic, good but not authentic, fairly authentic but not particularly good. I must leave them to sort it out amongst themselves but my own pleasure in certain items (without regard to their authenticity or the reverse) led me to realise afresh how easy it is to enjoy where one does not understand, but that the purest enjoyment, where knowledge is added to visual pleasure, is denied where there is no real understanding. That kind of enjoyment is the rarest, but so rewarding when it comes that it is worth all the waiting. Yet I think anyone would find it easy to recognise that the guitar playing of David Moreno was something altogether extraordinary; and how moving it was to see the charming gesture with which he held out his instrument as though to show that it and not he had earned the applause.

Best news of all on the Spanish dancing front is that Rosario and Antonio, who make all other Spanish dancers of the day look as if they are standing still, are coming to England early next year.

Caryl Brahms, who writes on the Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo season in this issue, is one of the admirers of *Tristan Fou* and presents an interesting minority opinion. I did not care about it one way or another myself, found some of the choreographic moments deeply impressive (the solo to the cor anglais "Shepherd" theme from the third act of *Tristan und Isolde* is spine prickling in its aptness), and others ludicrous (can anyone really take seriously the praying mantis transformation of Isolde?). And I regretted that the effect of the magnificently painted Dali décor should have been so largely neutralised by the costumes and general goings-on of wheelbarrow pushers *et al.* Some people seem to have been outraged by the sex symbolism, but I am afraid I must be a bit dull because I never quite know what sex symbolism is, though I can recognise the real thing well enough when I see it in such ballets as *Carmen.*

(Cont'd on Page 18)

Action photograph by Frank Sharman

TAMARA TOUMANOVA AND ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY IN "GISELLE", ACT 2

A BROMIDE IN THE BALLET

By CARYL BRAHMS

OUR ballet-going has been on the listless side at The Garden, this summer.

The Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo brought us dancers of flawless technique and little temperament; dancers of great temperament but little technique; dancers of high promise; dancers of, so far as the human eye can see, no promise; dancers doing their best; dancers doing their worst; and just dancers. There was also a *corps de ballet*. Often it appeared to be preoccupied, but never with the conductor's beat.

Of the four new works they presented, I watched only one with absorption and tense excitement. A ballet can sometimes have a secondary intention in addition to its primary subject. For instance, Balanchine used his *Apollon Musagètes* as a medium for inventing new groupings of the dancers' limbs. And the Ashton-Stravinsky *Scènes de Ballet* has always seemed to me to be a nostalgic threnody for the 'thirties, as much in its choreography as in its music—an emotional *recherches du temps perdu* as well as an essay in pure balletics. So, *Mad Tristan* is not only the death-dream of Wagner's Tristan, but, indeed, a ballet about a mental anguish expressed in terms of physical agony. I have seen this extraordinarily compelling work—the last ballet, which, in the blue print, I would expect to approve or to enjoy—three times, and each time I have found myself sitting forward in my seat, tense with excitement—a thing that happens to me all too rarely at the ballet at Covent Garden these days.

Mad Tristan should be considered in two ways. First as a decoration: then as a continuation of—and not a substitution for—the opera in the same way that Helpmann's *Hamlet* is a continuation of the events in Shakespeare's play, and not in the same way that Petit's *Carmen* substitutes a danced enactment of Bizet's opera.

Considered as a decoration, then, the work is a monument to decay. Dali, like other painters of the surrealist school, is obsessed by mortality. By the death that comes too soon. The pain of the eye pierced by the arrow; the severed limb; the violence that gets the guts, haunts him as the passing of Time haunted Elizabethan writers, and moves him to pity.

I believe the *rideau* with its images of suffering and the two backcloths will endure in text books long after the ballet ceases to hold the stage. And although surrealism is not my realism, I found the lowering of the body into the tomb in its winding sheet, moving to a degree. And while I am not prepared to declare with my hand on my heart that I see Love as a lot of brown-green lobsters in a delirium, or Death as a gaggle of gay little dish-mops, I do think that Massine has perfectly realised Dali's intention and I can see a great unity of expression between dance-design and stage-design.

Why, when I am immoderately offended by the use of Bach's inspired double concerto for the violin, in *Concerto Barocco*, and moderately mortified by the re-arrangement of Bizet's music in the ballet of *Carmen*, I am not more appalled by the treatment of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, I find it hard to clarify. It may be because, looking as I do on Wagner's operas as fruits of the period to be tasted, as it were, in inverted commas, and feeling that this ballet of a blood-hungry Isolde is an extension and comment upon the opera, it seems to me to be as justifiable as T. S. Eliot's comment upon and extension of Falstaff's line:

"I grow old, I grow old
I must wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled."

The Dali-Massine-Wagner *Tristan* must be taken in exactly the same spirit.

Of the other three new works presented during the season, two of them—*Infanta* and *Enchanted Mill*—were by Lichine and the trouble with this talented choreographer is not that he has no ideas, but that he has too many of them at once.

Two ballets were revived that gave me vivid pleasure, though the décor of the second was in a sorry state, and the costumes of the first had been revised to our disadvantage.

Les Biches, the Nijinska-Poulenc-Laurencin ballet is another of those works with a double intention. Ostensibly a gathering of bright young guests at a house-party it is in reality a wicked little essay on the forbidden fruits of love, but apart from Marjorie Tallchief as The Page, and Skibine as, shall we say, the Paying Guest, I doubt if the cast realises this. This work is spare, witty and immensely to the point in every bar of music and every sequence of the dance—a perfect Diaghilev period piece, so dead and yet so living that it has become a kind of *Les Sylphides* of the fox-trot.

Night Shadow, the other pleasing revival, is by Balanchine to music by Rieti based on Bellini, and in it a Poet and la Somnambule are swept to their romantic disaster on rich curves of sound.

A third revival, *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur*, though audiences were well-pleased by it, seemed to me to have but little kinship with the vivacious and enchantingly deft original. It reminded me of a seventh child in whom the imprint of the family features has become a little faint. Massine has modified and simplified the work until what was once fluent and flowing is now jerky and convulsive. Nor was he helped by the first-night cast, who, with the exception of René Bon and Lichine, seemed neither to know nor care, overmuch, what all the pother and pitter-patter was about. Constanzia, the forsaken wife, bereft of the Crimson Crinoline which still adorns the circle-staircase of His Majesty's Theatre in the painting of Tchernicheva, has suffered most. Her entrance on the chime of the hour, her grief, the simple dignity of the three obeisances to the three passers-by, used once to stop the world for me. A change in any of the three creative arts of the Ballet—choreography, music, or décor—is dangerous; it takes so little, after all, to upset a soufflé. Even Diaghilev only accomplished the miracle once; he replaced the original décors (Were they by Golovin?) for *L'Oiseau de Feu* by the fabulous sets of Gontcharova. I found the change from Bakst's dim square in the Scarlatti-Massine work to Derain's sun-bright canal disturbing. And the lighting altered the time of day and the entire atmosphere of one of Ballet's enduring delights.

ANDRÉ EGLEVSKY AND MARJORIE TALLCHIEF IN "TRISTAN FOU"

Photograph by Lido

Le Beau Danube was also revived by this company, but I am very much afraid that the new ballet-goer can have little idea how alive and gay the work once was.

Can it be that Massine's ballets are only as good as the artists who dance them, and that if, for any reason, they fall short of ease and radiance, the work itself diminishes and falters, or is it simply that Massine's revivals of his works are half-forgotten and over-simplified?

* * * * *

This year the visiting company has been stiff with stars. Toumanova, Riabouchinska, Hightower, Tallchief, Pagava, Massine, Lichine, Eglevsky, Skibine—it is a most distinguished constellation, but rarely did it drive our listlessness away. There is no more depressing sight than to see great dancers in a morass of artistic ineptness. I cannot congratulate the visiting artistic direction either upon its taste in décors nor on its conductor.

Toumanova had not been seen in London since before the war. I wish someone would tell her to tuck her chin in, and would then create a ballet to utilise her great gift for drama and tragedy, but would give her no opportunity to practise her *équilibre* on one *pointe*. To stand poised indefinitely holding up stage-event and orchestra, is all very well in its place—in that vulgar little tear-off from *Don Quixote*, for instance, which is only introduced in a programme for the sake of its pyrotechnics. Both Toumanova and Eglevsky suffer from having a *specialité de la maison*—Choreographers are apt to use Eglevsky's eight or ten slow turns, or Toumanova's one toe, not only in every new ballet they create for them, irrespective of characterisation and situation, but more than once at that. Soon our astonishment at their virtuosity has turned into a surfeit of turns or toes and we tend to take the miracle rather crossly for granted and murmur to ourselves "Not again!" But Toumanova's generosity of approach and dedication to her ballets was a grateful sight.

Eglevsky has now added flow to his monumentally complete technique. But his work is also monumentally dull. It entirely lacks the small-talk of the dance. Perfection can pall when it is not touched by animation. But I grant you that he is a near-infallible technician—one of the seven wonders of the ballet of his times.*

Hightower, too, is a great technician. But her technique is of the matter-of-fact order, yet with it she achieves her own kind of unconcerned poetry; the poetry of a painting of a homely conversation piece of

* Not even wild stamped and addressed envelopes will drag the other six from me.

MARJORIE TALLCHIEF AND GEORGE SKIBINE IN "CONCERTO BAROCCO"

Action photograph by Roger Wood

the Dutch School as opposed to a French Impressionist canvas.

Save for her Prelude in *Les Sylphides*, in which the effort to be ethereal defeats itself, Riabouchinska can almost be said to have found herself again. Her mid-run performance of the Maid in *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* put me in a good humour. It was light as a silver sixpence, pert as a flourish on the piccolo, and neat as a parliamentary secretary's explanation. And the elegance and eloquent artistry of Skibine and the new-world *expertise* of Tallchief shone out among the shabby and for the most part tasteless décors and dull ballets.

We look to our summer visitors to act upon the spirits of our native dancers, musicians, choreographers and ballet-goers in a tonic manner. This is the third summer running that has had a depressing effect on us.

To be sure, we're an island that likes—nay clamours—to be visited, but not by the Ballet Bromide.

ETHERY PAGAVA AND GEORGE SKIBINE IN "NIGHT SHADOW"
Action photograph by Roger Wood

A BALLET-GOER'S CAUSERIE (2)

By ALAN STOREY

THE STAG AT BAY: A BACKGROUND WITH FIGURES

FREDERICK ASHTON owes much of his success as a choreographer to two things—a creative facility and a marked sensibility to changes in aesthetic climate. Had he so chosen, he could, I imagine, have made an equally brilliant career for himself as a dress-designer, interior decorator, or any other whose art lies in the anticipation and temporary appeasement of the desire for novelty. His successes follow his failures, like the marriages of certain socialites, with such disarming speed that the mind is dazzled and diverted almost unwittingly from one to the other—and the interments are stealthily and no less speedily discharged. He fingers the wind of fashion with such nicety that he is able to take advantage of its direction before one is aware of an altered course, or that the wind is not of his making. But if, like Carthage, his art rises from spoils and borrowings, it reveals in its completeness a tasteful discrimination and refinement which are wholly its own and which render it innocuous to all charges of plagiarism. Thus, in *Horoscope* and *Symphonic Variations*—examples which readily spring to mind—the idioms of Massine and Balanchine are assimilated with a certainty and ease which establish these works as vital pendants to the Symphonic Ballet and the more recently evolved type of non-representational dance; summing-up, as it were, the intentions and the achievements of the masters in a style at once expository and epigrammatic yet not without an intrinsic aesthetic value.

Ashton then, as I have suggested, is almost wholly eclectic in his approach to ballet; in other words, he is at ease in all its genres apart from the didactic or representational. His comparative failure in the latter sphere is, I believe, of vital importance to any consideration of Ashton's work since it not only mirrors the growing schism between technique and expression, between form and content in contemporary Western ballet, but what is more immediately interesting, also throws into significance Ashton's personal attitude to art and to life in general. To understand this point clearly one must take into account the choreographer's formative background; the prevailing artistic temper of the late twenties and, in particular, that of the declining Diaghilev ballet.

At this point it is relevant to ask whether it is possible for an art-form to remain indefinitely on an international level? Can it continue to derive inspiration and sustenance from a cosmopolitan source (in this instance the intellectual and aesthetic preoccupations of the fashionable world) without eventually reverting to the primary source of its media or, alternatively, disintegrating? The history of the Diaghilev Ballet would appear to deny such a possibility. It certainly did not begin as an international art-form. On the contrary, its opening phase coincided with the belated yet exquisite flowering of Romanticism produced by the Russian Nationalist movement. Dancers, composers, scenic artists and choreographers alike were predominantly Russian; its themes and modes of expression—with certain exceptions intended as a gesture to established taste—derived from national folk-lore and dance. These exceptions, as we know from contemporary reports, met with an indifferent reception. Jaded by the pseudo-formalism and absurdities of French academic ballet, Parisian audiences were neither in the mood nor prepared for Fokine's subtle restitution of formal values and linear development in such ballets as *Les Sylphides* and *Carnaval*. Their immediate desire was for more violent sensations of movement, colour and sound —for anything, in fact, that could provide temporary escape from over-refined conventions.

Diaghilev was not the acute diagnostician of aesthetic crises he is commonly made out to be by adulators, but rather the modish specialist who is called in to confirm the opinions of others and to prescribe a fashionably unorthodox remedy. At this time, the remedy—an injection of nationalism suitably refined for sophisticated palates—owed most of its efficacy to Fokine's choreographic genius, which provided direction for the diverse and often conflicting ideals of his colleagues, and co-ordinated them into a satisfying whole. But when Fokine eventually left Diaghilev, the choreographer's importance lessened until he became the subordinate of artist, composer and scenarist, to whom he relinquished his creative initiative. Meanwhile, the first World War drove Diaghilev into exile, from which he at last returned with a reorganised company, and Massine as principal choreographer, to exploit a new confusion of ideas and aesthetic theories. During the next seven years the *ballets russes* became a *magasin de luxe*, an exclusive *salon* designed to exhibit international art at its most *chic* and esoteric. There was a strange affinity between its work and that of Schiaperelli, or Rochas and Dior in the next two decades, in that its so-called "advances" and revolutionary trends were actually regressions, a descent on a diminishing spiral of time which, in the end, led it, like the legendary scorpion, to expire on the point of a too confined cleverness. Thus nationalism gave way to pastiche and a synthetisism in style and expression which delighted in witty misinterpretations of the past under the guise of extreme modernity. Its highest level was reached in *Le Tricorne*, *Pulcinella* and *Les Femmes de Bonne Humeur* (all *ballets bouffes* distinguished by Massine's vigorous dance characterisations), and its lowest in *Parade*, *Chout*, *Le Train Bleu*, and *Les Facheux*. This was the period when Ashton and most of his contemporaries—dancers and balletomanes—were first introduced to ballet. Viewed from the lush, vegetable world of present-day ballet, it strikes the eye like a glittering mica plain. There was nothing ecstatic or sublime in the work it produced but merely the intentional aggravation of a prevalent neural itch.

During Diaghilev's final period, the retreat from Fokine's ideals moved from the *salon* to the nursery, where the great impresario and his followers seemed to forget the world in their admiration of expensive playthings. It was the age—to quote Diaghilev—of "*Mouvements mécaniques*" and "*Constructivisme*"; of *Le Bal*, *Le Pas d'Acier*, *La Chatte* and *Ode*. In it movement was for the most part redundant, and the forced, irrelevant posturings of its dancers little more than pointers to the inventions of Gabo and Pevsner, Jakulov and Tchelichev. The costume and set designs of the ballets of the period, together with Mr. Beaumont's synopses, bear a remarkable resemblance to those of the seventeenth century described by Menestrier. And it is possible to detect a similar ennui, dissatisfaction, perhaps self-disgust in the cynical misuse of myth and allegory. Even Diaghilev's letter to *The Times*, in defence of his protégés, betrays weariness and a significant lack of conviction; it was, one feels, the last stand of a dispirited man, a man without roots. "What is to be done?" Levinson had asked as far back as 1924. "The question is just as acute as ever. What is to be done to fit choreographic movement to music? What is to be done to harmonise the dancer's *plastique*, a formal element with the problems of expression and of symbolic gesture? Should the traditions of the classic dance be frankly employed or should they be relegated to second place and only used surreptitiously?" By 1929 the question had grown far more acute. But it was obviously impossible to resolve the problems so clearly underlined by Levinson whilst choreographers remained in a state of servitude to the whims of an *avant-garde* intelligentsia which regarded ballet as being little more than an intellectual charade.

* * *

Mr. P. H. Newby recently commented on the modern British novelist's odd preoccupation with the state and condition of childhood, which he pursues down the labyrinthine ways of memory as though it contained the key to his present creative dilemma. Ashton, on the contrary, has no need to do so. For, like the crippled boy in Browning's *Pied Piper*, he has been left behind—not unwillingly perhaps. Massine, Balanchine, Lifar,

nd the others, led on by Time, have entered a promised and of choreographic freedom. And he who once ooked so covetously into the enchanted garden, the condemned playground", withheld, as it were, by xtreme youth and parental disapproval, is able at last to vander there alone; evoking at will the ghosts of its ransient splendours, and secure in the knowledge that e is far from the outside world—the world which he nstinctively distrusts since he cannot be sure of its pprobation.

This distrust, amounting almost to fear, fills his eing, informs his reaction to life, and flits uneasily hroughout his work—occasionally betraying its presence n a startling manner. Consequently, his ballets—articularly *Nocturne* and *Cinderella*—are more personally evealing than those of any other choreographer I know. And this in spite of the fact that they are otherwise acking in that element of understanding and feeling for umanity which is expressed by Massine's earthy umour; Tudor's explorations of the inarticulate; ooss's ironical revelation of human behaviour; and Miss Howard's feminine recognition of its ambiguities. But then his apparent inability to create dramatically, to nfold a plot and develop characterisations, is possibly ymptomatic. The protagonist in Thomas Mann's short tory *Disillusionment* attributes his disappointment with he manifestation of reality to the pathetic optimism of is early surroundings. "We breathed (then) a strange tmosphere . . . of large words for good and evil, eautiful and base," he remarks. ". . . For me life onsisted utterly of those large words; for I knew no nore of it than the insubstantial emotions which they alled up in me. From man I expected divine virtue or air-raising wickedness; from life either ravishing oveliness or else consummate horror . . ." And this eems to me to express precisely Ashton's predicament. ike the wife of the dejected individual in Thurber's artoon, he appears to exclaim, "Well, I'm disenchanted, oo. We're all disenchanted." And in his famous equest to Cocteau—"Etonne-moi, Jean," Diaghilev nerely expressed a similar state of mind.

Ashton's ballets fall easily into three classifications. irst, the always charming exercises in line and conventional plastic imagery—equivalent in spirit to the ubiquitous Elizabethan sonnet—which range in time and nood from *Les Rendezvous* to *Scènes de Ballet*. Secondly, he faintly satirical burlesques, *Façade*, *A Wedding Bouquet*, *Cupid and Psyche*, and *Les Sirènes*. And lastly, he conscience-driven grapplings with the "large words"; the deliberate struggles against facility of expression, and its attendant boredom; namely, the *ballets d'action* which include *Apparitions*, *Nocturne*, *Dante Sonata*, and *The Quest*.

Since my primary intention is to define the personal relationship between Ashton and his ballets rather than to evaluate his merits and demerits purely and simply as a choreographer, I propose to examine the third group before the others; and to begin with *Nocturne*, which is not only Ashton's most serious attempt at choreographic narration, but in many ways his most self-illuminating ballet, since it summarises both the prevailing influence of his cultural background and his tentative approach to the world outside his immediate apprehension.

Photograph by Angus McBean

FREDERICK ASHTON

The actual theme of *Nocturne* is conventional enough —so, for that matter, is the theme of *Pillar of Fire*—but its major flaw lies in the emotional insincerity laid bare by its development. Mr. Beaumont, somewhat circumspectly, describes the ballet as being "primarily an expression of mood, in which endeavour Ashton is completely successful." But moods, no matter how subjective, possess their own degrees of aesthetic and emotional validity; and in this connection it is important to determine the mood which Ashton is intent on exploiting. Certainly the foundation of the ballet, Delius's *Paris*, offers little explanation. As an impressionistic study of a city at night, its perambulatory mood is detached and undramatic. In it the composer is simply receptive, a submerged bi-valve already encrusted with arterio-sclerotic deposits; and neither the sounds he hears nor the sights he sees move him to philosophic or moral questionings. Ashton (or more accurately,

Mr. Edward Sackville-West) reverses the position. He sets the action in a specific period, the Edwardian, and then seeks to engage our sympathies by the anecdote of a poor flower-seller deceived by the importunate attentions of a rich young man, who eventually abandons her to the compassion of a stranger. Assuming, however, that flower-sellers really behave in this manner (and I suspect that though they may relish the situation in their literature, their reactions would be very different in reality), it is reasonable to expect that they will behave in character. Ashton's flower-girl does not. On the contrary, her movements throughout the ballet are far too complex—she "speaks", I am tempted to say, with the accent of the *Faubourg Saint-Germain* rather than *les Halles*; furthermore, her anguish is far too refined and, at its climax, as incongruous as Mimi's dying coloratura. Psychologically and aesthetically the whole of *Nocturne* is off-key. It is difficult to believe that a rich young man of the period would risk being black-balled by the Jockey Club for such abandoned behaviour, or that his friends would risk their social position in condoning it. It is useless to by-pass these arguments by describing *Nocturne* as a fairytale. To create a successful fairyt (or the best-selling romantic novel which is its mode equivalent) it is essential to believe implicitly in moral situation which forms its basis; and Ashto peculiar blend of naïveté and sophistication preve this. The situation he presents—*She was pore but she honest*—has no reality for him; whereas the absolut the "large words", refuse to be tempted down fr Olympus to occupy such fragile shells. No, the mo of *Nocturne* is neither fish, flesh nor fowl; neither fu blooded melodrama, drama or myth. It is, if anythi analogous to the mood of an elaborate charade, *fête champêtre*, in which the laws of reality are nece sarily subordinated to the improvised development an idea or ideas. In analysis these ideas would appear be the exquisite dance of the flower-girl—quite ina propriate in its context—and Ashton's astonishi daydream of one of his "secret lives" projected in his creation of the Stranger . . .

(To be continued)

BALLET AT EIGHT AT THE MERCURY

By FRANK JACKSON

AFTER her long absence overseas, it was very pleasant to welcome Madame Rambert home to the Mercury Theatre, where she opened a ballet season on May 30th under the title "Ballet at Eight."

The programme made it clear that the "Ballet at Eight" Company was not to be considered the same thing as the Ballet Rambert, but since, with the exception of Walter Gore's *Kaleidoscope*, the entire repertoire consisted of Ballet Rambert favourites, only those with the shortest memories could see them completely fresh, unencumbered by memories ; and comparisons, I fear, were unavoidable. My own memories spoiled much of the programme for me because, although several of the ballets were in fact designed for similarly cramped circumstances, I have for so long been seeing them on larger stages that I found it distressing when movements had to be cut down to fit the pocket-handkerchief Mercury stage. There were difficulties, too, with the complicated entrances and exits in ballets like *Czernyana* and *Mr. Punch*.

The story ballets (*Lady into Fox* or *Jardin aux Lilas*) suffered least because the drama removed the weight of our attention from the dancing. The quieter items in *Czernyana*, too, were very pleasing. But the closeness of audience and stage shattered illusion and magnified technical weaknesses. Thus *Plaisance*—which depend on dancing to make its effect—was difficult to enjo above the breathing and creaking of the dancers ; an Madame Rambert would be wise to omit completel from her programmes excerpts from classical ballet which, under these difficult circumstances and witho very strong dancers, take on the character of class-roo tryouts.

I do not wish to suggest that there is no place fo small-scale work in this country nowadays. Th contrary would be true. British Ballet began under jus such conditions and in their time many of the early works in the present programme exercised a con siderable influence on the course of development o our Ballet. We all need to remember, too, that British Ballet owes more to Madame Rambert than to any othe single person, at a time when our only big company is in danger of being stifled by its own importance and for getting that it owes its existence to small-scale experi ments (from which came most of our choreographers and designers and many of our dancers). The future of our Ballet depends on the discovery and development o such new talent. In this direction Madame Rambert's organisation can play a vital and revitalising part. To quote the programme again, here is a small company

perhaps unique in the world in possessing its own staff, studios wardrobes, workshops, and indeed everything needful to theatrical creation." A heaven sent opportunity !

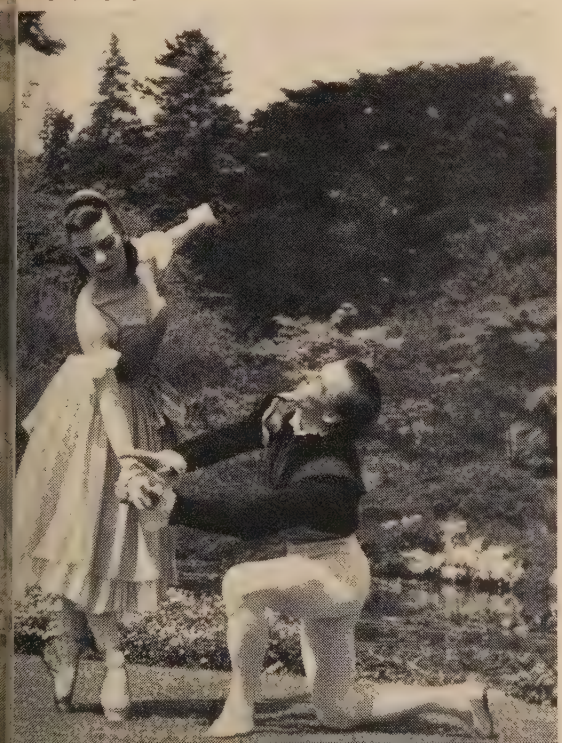
But nothing valuable will come out of this without a willingness to experiment, to cut ties with the past, to build gradually an entirely new repertoire. Large-scale works cut down to fit the Mercury stage will get no one anywhere. That is why I hope *Kaleidoscope*, the only new work of the season, and a sort of hangover from more spacious days, is not a pointer to future policy.

I hasten to add that I enjoyed *Kaleidoscope* for its genuine spirit of gaiety. It is such a relief to see a new work which is happy in spirit, and non-literary, without moral or story, though the music (Brahms' *Paganini Variations*) seemed to me too profound to accompany the dances of insect-like creatures.

Of the dancers, I missed Sally Gilmour, Joyce Graeme and John Gilpin particularly, though there is some fine talent in the new Company. Annette Chappell looks sweet and dances the *Giselle pas de deux* with charm, though she is not really strong enough technically for it, especially at such close quarters. Margaret Hill, on one and the same evening, managed to make a convincing Caroline and an even more convincing Venus in *Judgment of Paris*). I imagine it is in comedy that her future lies ; she has a very expressive face and a dry sense of humour, never over-stated, which is quite

PAULA HINTON AND WALTER GORE REHEARSING IN THE GARDENS DURING THE BATH FESTIVAL

Photograph by Cyril West



delightful. This came over particularly in *Gala Performance* as the Ballerina from Milan—a brilliant parody of classical *adage*. Paula Hinton, I fancy, will prove the season's biggest discovery. She is not only beautiful to look at, but shows signs of developing into a very good dancer. The biggest compliment I can pay her is that I could accept her Mrs. Tebrick on its own merits, without sighing for Sally Gilmour.

Apart from Walter Gore, the men are nowhere near as interesting as the girls. This, unhappily, is a general fault in this country. Gore himself seemed somewhat depressed by the size of the stage on those occasions when I saw him, and was not at his best except in his three witty *Czernyana* characterisations. The others I would prefer not to discuss.

And now it only remains to look forward to the exciting things which I feel sure will come out of the Company once it has settled down to its new conditions.

BALLET PIANIST

By TREVOR FISHER

THE range of the ballet pianist's work is wide, but not deep. On the one hand he must expect to combine the technique of the virtuoso, the sympathetic collaboration of the accompanist, the initiative and support of the conductor, and the lightning adaptability of the stage manager. A tall order ? Art always is a tall order. The pianist's work, on the other hand, exists mainly in extension. Rhythm, colour, and distinctness are absolute requisites : personal interpretation, tonal values, and architectural shapeliness, essential to the "self-sufficient" music of the concert platform, belong, in this field, to the total work, that is to say, the ensemble of idea, choreography, dancing, décor, lighting, and music. (Typical ballet music, heard in isolation, sounds so insufficient, when not actually second-rate, that the listener must in his own imagination picture the rest to go with it.) And the ballet pianist playing for rehearsal, and even more for actual performance, feels himself to be, not an independent agent absorbed in the interpretation and radiation of a musical work, temporarily oblivious to surroundings, but an actor working in conjunction with the stage staff, simultaneously conscious of the stage action and of the musical effect.

In addition to the preparation of a work, the pianist plays for ballet class, where, if he does not use the official albums of graded pieces, he either improvises phrases in appropriate rhythms or conjures up from memory suitable measures from the simpler classics, such as Schubert's Dances, pieces by Rameau or Couperin, "snatches" of Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, folk-song settings, pier concert-party gems, or current

musical comedy selections. As well as play for class, rehearsal, and performance, he may be asked to make arrangements of music, of orchestral works into piano scores, of old opera music into ballet suites (with the consequent transposing and dovetailing), or of piano solos into duets for one, or for two, pianos. Composers have made good use of their experience of this hack-work to devise original scores.

Nor is the pianist's imposed versatility confined to playing the piano. Especially if he or she tours with a company, demands and adjustments may include anything from research into the correct handling of a viola da gamba to removing a broken string from the piano ; anything from acting as interpreter to foreign artists to devising programme notes, suggesting ballet titles, being interviewed by the provincial press, selling programmes, assisting the ballerinas with unreachable buttons, collecting "props," being photographed, repairing pedals and music stands, copying vast masses of music (in dressing-rooms, buses, bedrooms, and even less commodious—or more—quarters) and going out for pots of tea.

It sounds amusingly glamorous, this job. But try it. Against the professional opportunities and manifold interest of this work must be offset severe limitations. At the start there is the stupefying work of playing for rehearsals, sometimes all day for weeks on end. Such work, if accepted as an end in itself, a mere living, is slavery. Its victims become disgruntled, round-shouldered, argumentative, and generally chain-smoke. For the more independent musician there is also a conflict between individual style and that required for ballet accompaniment. More particularly, there is the dreaded choreographer who interrupts rehearsal so frequently that the musical breathing—the phrasing—is choked, while the continual stopping-and-starting-again irritates and exhausts all but the tyrant. Even when "adapting" original solo piano music to the different medium of ballet or dance, the pianist may well feel cramped by having to iron out the movement, exaggerate the accents, make his playing too reliably uniform. (In this connection compare the orchestral-ballet *Les Sylphides* with the same pieces as played by Corto or Pachmann ; dancers have been heard to describe the latter as "erratic.") The playing of transcriptions for orchestral works is sometimes cruelly difficult although the experience should augment one's musical knowledge. Finally there is the vexed question never quite settled, as to whether the pianist should shadow the dancer and dominate the *corps de ballet*, or whether the dancer(s) should interpret the music as it comes, or both should fix beforehand an absolute tempo and dynamic (impossible when different stages are used as in touring.)

Certainly not all pianists play all the roles mentioned. The bored student interested only in picking up a few bob from day to day, the familiar hack, the sidetracked soloist, even the budding conductor, literally suffer the job : although on their behalf it must be repeated that no more deadening form of playing exists, with the innumerable repetitions, the sometimes uncongenial music, the long hours spent at a generally bad piano often in a poor light and a cold room, and the absolute lack of opportunity for self-expression, save through grousing. But for the young professional, and also—it must be admitted—for the not-so-young, the playing for detailed work in the studio can be immensely instructive, and a corrective for faulty rhythm and timing-sense. Through such work, moreover, occurs the opportunity to play for dance recitalists, gratifying although unfortunately rare sort of work.

METROPOLITAN BALLET

AFTER the excellent impression made by the Metropolitan Ballet at the Empress Hall it was all the more disappointing to witness the falling off in performance during their season at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, which began on July 11th.

The stage is small and inconvenient and most of the repertoire was entirely unsuited to the conditions, in addition to which the orchestral accompaniment of two pianos and two violins was a most unhappy choice. Even had they been magnificently played they still would not have been adequate for the presentation of the *Dances from "Prince Igor"* which came dangerously close to being ludicrous under these conditions. The Danish dancers, Paul Gnatt and Eric Bruhn, were greatly missed and the company was much weaker on the male side than it has been for a long time. Henry Danton, who has joined the company for this season and the following tour, has always promised more than he actually performed and danced less well than his long sojourn in Paris had led one to hope.

The production of *Coppélia, Act* 2, was singularly ill-judged, and Celia Franca could never be anyone's choice for Swanilda. Neither do I think it is now possible to present in London this kind of second act *Swan Lake*, while fully realising that in the provinces it is essential to have this ballet and *Les Sylphides* permanently in the repertoire. Svetlana Beriosova is, as I have said before, potentially one of the most important ballet personalities of this generation, but it would be quite wrong if at her present stage of development her Odette were any more mature than it is. This means that it is not yet ready for public performance and it is a great pity that audiences should witness the technical struggles of a most charming and talented young dancer. Odette

was intended for an actual, not a potential, prima ballerina and it should shock everyone that this fact is so frequently ignored. Beriosova is perfect and extremely moving in works like *Fanciulla delle Rose* and *Designs with Strings*, which were created for her.

Designs with Strings remains by far the most satisfying item in the Metropolitan repertoire. It does not by any means suffer in comparison with the same ballet as produced by its choreographer, John Taras, for the Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo. Indeed, except that the latter production has the advantage of Skibine's presence, the Metropolitan dancers have caught the feeling with far greater certainty.

Domini Callaghan should prove a notable acquisition to the company. She dances with great ease and precision and only needs the right guidance to become a very considerable artist.

During the season three new ballets were presented including *Ballamento* by Andrée Howard to music by Vivaldi: a pleasant if somewhat unimportant excursion into pure ballet. Although it opens in a somewhat disconcerting stage mist, this ballet has well-balanced groupings and *enchaînements* which should be equally effective on stages of almost any size. The teamwork of the dancers was admirable.

Of the two experimental ballets by new choreographers *Trio Détruit* by Michael Holmes was the more interesting. Its free patterns for the principals against the more formal designs for the *corps de ballet* showed considerable promise, and the dramatic interpretations of Celia Franca, Domini Callaghan and Eric Hyrst were very moving. P.W.M.

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN (1799-1837)

PUSHKIN AND THE SOVIET BALLET

By V. BOGDANOV-BEREZOVSKY

PUSHKIN'S distinguished contemporaries showed just appreciation of the historic role that he would play in the subsequent development of Russian culture. Regarding Pushkin as one of the phenomena of eternal value, Belinsky wrote: "Every age pronounces its own judgment of them, the next age will always have something new and still truer to say, but no age will ever say the whole," and, elsewhere: "No Russian poet can equal Pushkin as educator of the youth, the inspirer of youthful feelings."

Thanks to Pushkin the classical Russian literature of the last century developed so rapidly and richly; the literary heirs and descendants of the great poet embraced and continued the "cult of Pushkin" instituted by his most eminent contemporaries. The great proletarian writer Maxim Gorky regarded Pushkin as a national genius. "Pushkin," he wrote, "was the first to realise that literature is a national concern of paramount importance, that it is superior to office work and service at the Court; he was the first to raise the calling of a man of literature to heights unscaled before him: in his eyes the poet should express all the feelings and thoughts of the people, his mission is to understand and depict all the phenomena of life."

Pushkin—his work, his standing as a progressive representative of Russian culture—this is a living and sharp-edged weapon in our struggle today; not only is this the "heritage" we have received from preceding generations, it is also a treasure discovered by us, by our age.

The first Soviet ballet on a Pushkin subject appeared back in 1934. This was *The Fountain of Bakhchiserai* (music by the late Boris Asafiev, production by

R. Zakharov and libretto by N. Volkov) and was first staged at the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre. It has since become a steady favourite in the repertoires of all the big music theatres in the Soviet Union. Soviet art circles immediately recognised it as an event of great importance in principle, as a production rich in ideological content in which the dance ceases to be an artistic end in itself and the pantomime merely a means of conveying the details of the story. Both dance and pantomime become the means of revealing the fundamental idea of the work as embodied in an integrated dramatic form.

"The regeneration (if not the enlightenment) of a savage soul through the lofty emotion of love. A great and profound ideal "—was Belinsky's formulation of the idea behind the poem. This was the idea upon which the Soviet choreographic production was based. The author of the libretto enlarged somewhat upon the plot of the poem, developing in greater detail some of the situations that Pushkin merely hinted at.

The Fountain of Bakhchiserai proved to be more than the first genuinely *Pushkin* ballet in the history of world choreography. It was a genuine innovation which blazed a path for a whole series of important Soviet choreographic achievements in producing performances rich in ideological and psychological contents and good acting.

With this ballet R. V. Zakharov made his debut. In his person Soviet choreography acquired a ballet master and stage director who in producing a ballet proceeded from the general conception of the work with which he was dealing, who was not merely a "dance producer" but a joint author of the general ideological and artistic scheme. This was a new method to be established in the Soviet Ballet and subsequently it became the leading method of the best ballet-masters in the country. There was no room for passive figurants in *The Fountain of Bakhchiserai*. All the cast—the leading characters and minor ones, the soloists and the *corps de ballet*, the members of small group scenes and the mimes—were drawn into the action, became living participants in the drama being enacted.

The Fountain of Bakhchiserai was followed by two Soviet ballets on Pushkin's poem *The Gypsies**: one by S. V. Vasilenko, produced by ballet master N. S. Kholfin at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre in Moscow, and the other by V. K. Sorokin, performed by the members of the amateur art circles of the "Krasny Treugolnik" Factory in Leningrad; and by two different stage versions of Asafiev's ballet *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*—one produced by R. V. Zakharov at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, the other by L. M. Lavrovsky at the Leningrad Maly Opera Theatre. All four were new attempts at a modern interpretation of Pushkin's romantic poems, in which Soviet artists strived to overcome the limitations of romanticism an imbue it with realistic elements. In doing so they we guided by Belinsky's definition that ". . . in its close and most essential meaning romanticism is nothing b man's inner world, the inmost life of his heart."

The Vasilenko-Kholfin version of *The Gypsies* is a interesting attempt, and what is most indicative, th first, at a ballet interpretation of this poem which h repeatedly attracted composers as a subject for an oper Some ten operas were based on it before the revolutio but the only one of these that is deservedly widel known is Rachmaninov's *Aleko* (libretto by V. Nemirovich-Danchenko).

It was Vasilenko's and Sorokin's aim to disclose th basic philosophical and dramatic motif of the poem— the contrast between the concepts of duty and freedom the individual and society. The talented performe achieved a combination of the romantic and realistic successfully disclosed "the inmost life of the heart." Gypsy life is truthfully delineated; Zemfira's song "Cut me, burn me, my old husband, my terrible husband," is convincingly translated into dance form; Aleko's monologue is eloquently dramatic. On the other hand, the romantic, "poetic" quality is expressed in the love duet between Zemfira and the young Gyps in the finale of the production, in the Gypsies' farewel to the dead Zemfira, their denunciation of Aleko and the rhythmic "mourning procession" of the women past the immobile slayer. Vasilenko's music is colourfully pictorial and spirited, and makes appropriate and beautiful use of Gypsy folk-lore.

* * * * *

The best ballet on Pushkin's romantic poems is Asafiev's *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*. It vividly and strikingly develops the principal themes of Pushkin's poem—the theme of freedom and voluntary banishment, the contrast between the life of the mountaineers and fashionable society "chained by prejudices and conventions, voluntarily binding itself to the demeaning worship of the idol, gold" (Belinsky); the theme of humanism and the moral strength of a profound love which surmounts class (and therefore conventional) inequality between people. *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* was produced at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow by Zakharov and in Leningrad by Lavrovsky. Both productions were based on the libretto by N. D. Volkov.

Zakharov's production was particularly successful. It could be said to represent a series of realistic illustrations of Pushkin's theme. The stage directing of the Caucasian scenes was particularly brilliant. These scenes reproduced lifelike pictures of the life of the mountaineers and of their military games and dances. The producer presented a rich picture of the life of a people, which was more than merely a background for the drama of a Cherkess maiden and a prisoner. The contrast between two national and class cultures—

*This is also the basis of Massine's *Aleko* produced for Ballet Theatre in 1942, with music by Tchaikovsky.

OLGA LEPESHINSKAYA AND V. PREOBRAJENSKY IN "THE LADY PEASANT" (*Top picture*)

(*Lower picture*) VERA VASILIEVA AND A. ZHUKOV IN "THE FOUNTAIN OF BAKHCHISERAI"

this is the cornerstone on the basis of which the theme of *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* is treated in Zakharov's production.

Both productions are valuable for their abundant use of national folk-dance material combined with elements of the classical and the character dance.

In 1940 the Leningrad Maly Opera Theatre staged *The Tale of the Pope and His Workman Balda*, a ballet by M. Chulaki. This was an interesting and bold attempt to create an altogether new genre variety of the Pushkin ballet—a folk-dance comedy.

Of all Pushkin's tales *The Tale of the Pope and His Workman Balda* is politically the sharpest and the most acute. Maxim Gorky's remarkable characterisation of Pushkin's tales fits it above all others. "Pushkin," Gorky wrote, "was the first Russian writer to pay attention to folklore and introduce it in literature . . . he adorned the folk-song and folk-tale with the lustre of his own talent, but *left their meaning and power intact . . . Pushkin did not conceal, did not gloss over the people's mocking, negative attitude towards the priests and kings, but, on the contrary, drew it in still sharper relief.*" (Italics mine—V.B.-B.)

The above defines both the significance of the production of this ballet and the difficulties involved. It was necessary to find a way of creatively combining the technique of classical choreography with the Russian national character dance, of achieving an organic fusion of the realistic and fantastic, of genre and satiric elements, and, finally (and this, of course, was the most important) of investing the production with a truly powerful political note.

Pushkin's verse tale is exceedingly laconic. In dramatising it the authors of the production naturally had to develop its episodes and scenes in greater detail. Thus the first introductory twenty-four lines of the tale (the avaricious Pope's profitable, as he thinks, deal with a workman) are developed into a whole act in the ballet by means of a series of genre scenes. Excellent means were found of conveying the ideas of the text visually. For instance, the witty dance of the things (stools, broom, samovar, barrels, logs) which come to life in the hands of the tireless workman, seem to illustrate the lines:

> *"And he lives with the Pope, does Balda,*
> *And he sleeps on straw pallet; but ah!*
> *He gabbles like four men,*
> *Yet he labours like seven or more men.*
> *The sun is not up, but the work simply races . . ."*

The fusion of the classical and national character dance, begun in *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*, was continued in this ballet. This is to be seen in the large ensemble numbers, for instance, in the excellently arranged "Russian rhapsody" which opens the fourth act to the strains of a variation of the song "A little birch stood in the field," and in individual touches of the dances, in the roles of the Pope's wife and son, and in the arrangement of the entire role of the hero.

In 1946 the branch of the Bolshoi Theatre staged Asafiev's ballet *The Lady Peasant* (libretto by N. D. Volkov.)

"*The Lady Peasant* is not a very long story but when you turn to it as a subject for a ballet," writes N. Volkov, "you cannot help feeling how inwardly intricate is the transparent clarity of Pushkin's prose, how rich is the content concealed in this airy and graceful story."

The principal merit and novelty of the ballet *The Lady Peasant* seems to us to lie in the fact that the producer achieved that "accuracy and brevity," that "charm of bare simplicity," which distinguish Pushkin's subtly poetic and highly meaningful prose. The result was a ballet of a special chamber-music type, which conveys the atmosphere of Pushkin's age, is wittily comic, sometimes grotesque, justly replete with elements of pantomime. On the other hand, the lyrical quality of the production, mounting in scale through the three love duets between Liza and Alexi, is fresh and full of sincere feeling.

To the genres of the romantic poem, the folk-tale, the realistic story, the comedy and the drama, we must add the monumental, historic epic and tragic genre. The task of establishing this genre in the ballet was carried out in R. Glière's *The Bronze Horseman* (scenario by P. F. Abolimov), produced by R. V. Zakharov at the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre in Leningrad.

Deep insight into Pushkin's images, truthful embodiment of the basic dramatic conflict of the poem—the fate of "the little man" crushed by the relentless march of history—suggested to R. Glière the correct principle on which to treat this theme. The philosophical idea of Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman*, revealed in the poem through the fate of Evgeny, and "inexpressible" on the ballet stage, forms the foundation of the musical-dramatic development of the ballet story.

As Belinsky said, the real hero of the poem is St. Petersburg itself. This made the task of the authors all the more difficult. Nevertheless, they produced a ballet which preserved the poet's idea and left the great city "the real hero," while at the same time the ballet told the story of Evgeny and Parasha—a lyrical pair of "little men" who perished in a terrible flood.

This is veritably a Pushkin ballet in every respect—in the treatment of the characters of Evgeny and Parasha, in the treatment of the city, and in Glière's music.

The Soviet ballet is meeting the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great Russian national poet with big achievements to its credit. The ties between Soviet musical and dramatic art and Pushkin's genius are growing wider and stronger and are giving birth to ever new works of art.

A STUDY IN BALLETIC SUFFERING

By MICHAEL CAREY

YOU can choose your city, you can choose which school, even your time—which can be almost at any hour from nine in the morning to nine at night. Given the licence of a literary magic carpet we can visit West Street in London, Salle Wacker in Paris, or West 57th Street in New York, and the most vital points of our impression will be the same in each case with little variation. Since in a previous article I described Preobrajenska as a teacher we may as well take her classroom as a good illustration.

Having passed through the room on the first floor of Salle Wacker where one finds the *concierge* and which resembles a market with ballet mothers and teachers as the negotiants, one climbs the narrow stairs to the top of the building to room number eight. Here on opening the door you may at first wonder if you have wandered into a Turkish Bath by mistake, for there is a predominating impression of steaminess and scantily dressed people with towels on their shoulders. It is two o'clock in the afternoon and the first class is nearly finished: on the left as you go in the door there is a row of dancers leaning against the barre watching the perspiring first class as they spin and bound through the final *enchaînements;* to your right stretches the room, with a mirror on the far wall revealing yet another and another pattern of arabesques.

"THE PRISONER IN THE CAUCASUS" AT THE LENINGRAD MALY OPERA THEATRE

Not only does the classroom look a little like a Turkish Bath but it has a further aspect which is more subtly reminiscent: it is the curious paradox one sees in the dancers of the presence of both pleasure and suffering—just as though each one contains a pair of scales having on one side the suffering and on the other the pleasure. With the good and experienced dancer, or an exceptionally talented one without experience, the scales are so adjusted as to make pleasure the heavier, this being reflected in the style of the dancing and the expression on their faces.

In the classroom as in the Turkish Bath there is the same feeling of people subjecting their bodies to rigorous treatment and instead of deriving the normal pain and fatigue from it giving an appearance almost of enjoyment. But in the Turkish Bath the participants are creating nothing except perhaps a theoretical good health for the future, in our classroom there is a very definite creative activity going on whether the dancing produced is good or bad: there is, day after day, an endless struggle put up by these dancers to create beautiful or striking lines with their bodies, and by joining each pose to weld them into a fluid and logical stream of movement which may give to the onlooker pleasure, and perhaps fresh emotional conceptions. It need hardly be said that the scales in the analogy used above are not always happily balanced—the endless struggle becomes a drawn-out defeat when they are tipped on to the side of suffering, and here one notices a curious fact: that the dancer is rarely deterred by such discomfort. To make it clear why this should be so it is necessary to pause and examine a supposition which is to be found implied in a superficial way in only too many of the less critical writings about ballet and its personalities —namely the idea that ballet can be akin to a religion with the artists concerned in its production. Only recently in the film *The Red Shoes* was such an implication made; it is not surprising that such a half-truth—for that is all it is—should emerge from the false and childish story told in this film since the very basis of its absurdity is the fact that the authors of the script were unable to see where and how far these obscure "religious" motives will influence a dancer and were, in fact, deter-

mined to wallow in their *kitsch* conception to the exclusion of the reality in a dancer's life. That there is a strange quality of compulsion present in ballet which makes its practice a necessity beyond the common motives of money and ambition is undoubtedly true. That this compulsion may be compared to a religious motive is also true; what is not true is the assumption that the dancer cannot ever be swayed by considerations of a non-balletic character such as money, or marriage. The compulsion is usually present but is one voice in a choir of motives, neither stronger nor weaker than the others but of a very haunting quality.

That this "religious compulsion" really exists will be obvious to anyone who has had occasion to be present at the classes of a reputable ballet teacher for any length of time; they will know that such classes consist of three types of dancer—the professional, the student, and the "inexplicable". I call the third variety the "inexplicable" because, to an inexperienced onlooker, their presence would be very hard to explain in terms of ordinary, rational motives. You may see them in the classrooms of London, Paris, and, I don't doubt, New York and Milan. They are possessed of little or no dancing talent, or in some cases a little talent but accompanied by impossible physical defects. They stumble along at the back of the class and the teacher after the first few lessons takes scant notice of them—but they continue to work seemingly unaffected by their lack of ability to progress. There can be only one possible explanation for this phenomena: these people must be in the power of dancing, for them it is necessary to put a pair of tights, a blouse, and ballet shoes into a case and trudge off to the dance studio each day to be tortured by the artificial and exhausting ordeal of a ballet class, just as it is necessary for the Mahommedan to unroll his prayer mat at noon each day and make his obeisance to Allah.

We can now take our foot off an imaginary lower step—the Turkish Bath analogy—and transfer it to an even more imaginary and higher one—Religion. It is not difficult to imagine oneself in the chapel of a new religious sect as one stands looking round this bare room overlooking the busy Parisian street—through the window you can see some of the everyday monuments of a Western capital, a gross streamlined luxury cinema, a respectable *lycée* for young ladies, a monument to a worthy defender of the *république*, and between them the endless stream of noisy hooting traffic and anxious hurrying people. The contrast of this scene with the inside of the room is striking: the weird figures—their bodies made uniform and sexless by tight fitting costumes—a group of amiable servants to Caligari, are still for a moment whilst the High Priest of the sect, Preobrajenska, pauses to pay respect to the outside world of nature as she scatters bread on the window sill for the birds, and then waters the floor of her altar ready for a fresh sacrifice. The pianist strikes the opening chord in her ritual music, unintentionally more startlingly discordant than the wildest atonal composition thanks to the age and neglect of the piano. A fresh round of sacrifice begins as the devotees at the barre stand erect *à la seconde* and with unseeing eyes bend their knees in the opening *pliés*—"unseeing" eyes only with respect to their immediate surroundings: doubtless they fortify themselves against the pain of their present exertion with the vision of future grand public rituals in which they themselves are high priests and priestesses.

What of these future public rituals? Do these dancers carry their discomfort to the eyes of the audience, and like the fakirs of India exult in the exhibition of their suffering? Obviously not—if they do it is a sign of failure. It is not the difficulty of the *tours de force* in classical dancing which thrill the onlooker but the apparent ease of execution present with a good dancer. That is the difference between the High Altar and the seminary of our religion: the dancer in the classroom struggles and sweats to perfect a muscular control which will banish suffering from the stage. And then, ironically enough, when called upon to express suffering he must, unless he is a Pavlova, a Karsavina or a Massine, fall back upon the resources of facial expression.

(*Cont'd. from Page 3*)

Every ballet lover who saw Toumanova's last *Giselle*, on July 28th, must surely have felt that they were witnessing one of those great performances that are talked about for years. She had shed many of the overstrained mannerisms which marred her work at the beginning of the season and her new simplicity gave her the poignancy that had been missing; and her dancing was nothing less than glorious. Toumanova has left the Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo and returned to her home in America. Surely there is a company and a choreographer somewhere who would know how to utilise her wonderful gifts.

It is not often that the hard-pressed ballet critic, panting from first night to first night, feels moved to write about a performance which he, or she, does not *have* to see. But Cilli Wang, whose short season at the Arts Theatre finished on July 31st, so entranced me that I feel I must express my pleasure publicly. Her characterisations are not so much people as symbols of people—*all* the Tyrolean dancers, *all* the Little Men whose unimportance has an underlying self-conceit, every Can-can dancer that ever was—though her performance is more mime than dancing and there is also the fun of discovering what trick illusion she is using (though I am not going to give the game away). Do try and see her when she returns on September 27th.

P.W.M.

ARE WE THROWING BALLET TO THE LIONS?

By LISA GORDON SMITH

THE latest fashion in Ballet is, apparently, that it should be performed in an arena, where to approximately two-thirds of the audience it wears a very New Look indeed; so new, in fact, as to be almost unrecognisable.

At the time of writing, we have already had two examples of this new-old fashion at the Empress Hall, and by the time these words appear there will have been a third dose at Harringay.

There is a certain amount to be said for this setting for ballet, for it gives London employment to dancers and companies who would otherwise have to spend yet more time touring ancient and frequently uncomfortable theatres in the Provinces. It also enables a large number of people to be present at ballet performances for a small financial outlay and without the discomforts and inconveniences associated with queueing for gallery tickets at Covent Garden—or at any other theatre where popular dancers or companies are appearing.

And here arises one of the major drawbacks to this matter of arena ballet. How many of these people who are present do, in fact, see ballet?

Watching the Markova and Dolin recital at the Empress Hall in January from the front row of the centre block, all shortcomings in presentation—and they were many—were lost in the delight of seeing Markova dancing so ravishingly after some (to me) rather disappointing performances at the Opera House.

Defunct turves and paper flowers; some highly poisonous-looking ivy lining the inside of the enclosure and presenting only sawn-off ends secured with some good, stout string to the startled gaze of the fifteen-shilling ticket holders; even what appeared to be the baby's washing hanging over the arc-lamps—all these were forgotten in the joy of Markova's Sugar-Plum variations.

But reports from people in the other parts of the hall were less satisfactory and called for investigation, and the viewing of the Ballet Festival in June from all quarters of the auditorium in turn revealed some angles on ballet which were very curious indeed.

Danilova, Massine, Franklin and the Metropolitan Ballet were presented in a setting which lacked nothing in neatness and care, and the orchestra was, unlike that of the earlier production, correctly positioned. The standard of dancing was brilliant, as with such guest artists it could scarcely fail to be, and Svetlana Beriosova alone was worth travelling several Irish miles to see.

The section of the audience in the centre block facing the stage had a good view of the performance, even the top back row being probably no further from the stage than is the gallery at Covent Garden. But as soon as one entered the side blocks all the familiar illusions were lost. To watch a motionless line of *corps de ballet* while being aware that Danilova is dancing the Swan Queen's *adage* just beyond them is the acme of frustration!

There were moments when the new angles revealed patterns of startling beauty, but those moments were rare and fleeting, and more often the dancers were outlined against the mass of dimly-lit blobs which were the faces of the opposite section of the audience. It was humbling to realise that one was, oneself, an equally infuriating blob to the people "over there!"

To the balletomane these new views of old ballets may be of interest, although they can give little satis-

ALEXANDRA DANILOVA WITH MICHEL DE LUTRY AND NICHOLAS BERIOSOFF IN "LE BEAU DANUBE"

Photograph by Duncan Melvin

faction; but to anyone new to ballet they might well nip all interest in the bud for ever. Certainly none will learn to love ballet from them, for what they are seeing is not ballet—it is just a poor view of good dancing.

Although at that particular Festival considerable effort appeared to have been made to adapt the ballets to being viewed from three sides, the success of this was dubious at best.

The conception of a ballet for the express purpose of being seen from one particular angle imposes some very definite obligations on the choreographer in the way of concentration of the composition lines of both the basic and the subsidiary designs ; and it is, therefore, quite impossible to adapt such a ballet to meet the requirements of a three-sided view without entirely changing its character. To produce (say) *Le Lac des Cygnes* satisfactorily in this way it would be necessary for the producer to forget everything he had ever seen or heard in connection with the ballet except the story and the music, and to start again from scratch. And then it would not be *Le Lac des Cygnes* at all, but Mr. So-and-so's new ballet about a Princess who was turned into a Swan, to some music by Tchaikovsky and designed to be seen from three sides.

The answer appears to lie in special choreography for the entire programme of such festivals, and a complete and very firm elimination of every ballet previously choreographed for the stage, and this would be financially impracticable unless a very long run, or a world tour of large arenas, could reasonably be expected.

Furthermore, it seems very doubtful whether choreography " in the round " could satisfactorily be achieved. A ballet must be beautiful and in character all the time. To encompass such an object, fulfilling the obligation of beauty and significance at every moment, to visual angles ranging from 1 to 270 degrees of a circle, appears a formidable if not an impossible task. Even sculpture, which must be beautiful from all angles, usually has a very definite "front view"—and sculpture only has to keep still!

To those (and they are not a few) who believe that anything old must perforce be better than anything newer, there may possibly be some mental satisfaction in the idea, if not in the fact, of going back some thousand years to the arena as a place of entertainment. But it does occasionally happen that an old thing is superseded by a new one because the new one is the better, and the theatre's succession to the arena seems to be a case in point.

As a good place for seeing Christians thrown to the lions, the arena undoubtedly had some advantages, for who can foretell which way a lion will wish to face while taking his breakfast?

But need we throw our ballet to the lions?

The Duncan Melvin photograph on the cover is of "Le Beau Danube" at the Empress Hall and shows Svetlana Beriosova (left) as the First Hand, Leonide Massine (centre) as the Hussar and Domini Callaghan (right) as the Young Girl.

THE SADLER'S WELLS BALLET AT THE MAY MUSICAL FESTIVAL OF FLORENCE

by FERDINAND REYNA

IN May, 1945, when Florence saw her Teatro Comunale destroyed by bombs, its reconstruction was started without delay. After two years of effort, the theatre was rebuilt, more magnificent than ever. The auditorium will seat 3,500; it has a very large parterre, two rows of boxes and an amphitheatre of the same dimensions. Red and white predominate in the decoration, gilding being sparingly used in the decoration of the boxes.

The question then was whether the tradition of the May Musical Festival would be renewed. Thanks to the courage and enterprise of the General Manager, Pariso Votto, the celebrated Symphony Orchestra of the Comunale was reassembled, and the Eleventh May Musical Festival was held last year. This was a trial season, lasting a month, and the results surpassed all expectations.

The Twelfth May Festival, held this year, has lasted two months, under the artistic direction of Francesco Siciliani, well known both for his knowledge and taste. I will not give the programme in detail, but mention only the masterly presentation of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, with superb décor by Giorgio di Chirico, at the première of which Princess Margaret was present; the operas of Mozart performed by the company of the Vienna Staatsoper; operas by Pergolesi, Cimarosa and Cherubini; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, conducted by Vittorio Guy, etc., etc.

The Ballet was represented this year by the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company, which visited Italy under the

MOIRA SHEARER'S FAME AS A FILM STAR HAD PRECEDED HER TO FLORENCE WHERE SHE WAS MUCH SOUGHT AFTER

auspices of the British Council. The Company gave eight performances, which included *Checkmate* and *The Rake's Progress*, by Ninette de Valois, *Symphonic Variations* and *Cinderella* by Frederick Ashton, and Robert Helpmann's *Hamlet*.

The Company had a remarkable success, the theatre being sold out for every performance—and it should be remembered that the public of Florence is a discriminating one, with a tradition of art and entertainment unsurpassed even in Italy. Frederick Ashton told me that he had had some doubts as to the public reception of *Cinderella*, which is a production very much in the British tradition. But the immediate success which he and Robert Helpmann enjoyed in the parts of the two Ugly Sisters dispelled his doubts; after all, Florence was the original home of the Commedia dell'Arte. The Florentine press commented on the grace and freshness of Moira Shearer, and the technique, elegance and expressiveness of the prima ballerina, Margot Fonteyn.

The *Nazione*, writing of Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*, says: "The choreography is most unusual in conception, and space is used to give dignity and amplitude to the design, whilst the six performers interweave the seemingly simple figures of the dance. These figures are executed with a clarity which makes them instantly effective. One is conscious of superb technical mastery, particularly in the adagio variation, accompanied by piano arpeggios. Here choreography and execution soar to the highest emotional plane."

In *Hamlet*, the tragedy is re-lived as a dream, and the absence of anecdote and libretto was appreciated. The romantic music of Tchaikovsky was effectively linked with Helpmann's creation by Leslie Hurry's décor and costumes, carried out in a modern romantic style—a good example of the part played by décor in the English ballet.

At the first night of *Cinderella*, Mr. Victor Mallett, the British Ambassador in Rome, joined in the applause —a well-merited ovation. The *Nuovo Giornale* of Florence writes of this ballet that it would suffice in itself to give an idea of the variety of technique and invention which place the Sadler's Wells Ballet on a high level of style and taste.

MRINALINI SARABHAI

With regard to the article which appeared in the last issue of *Ballet Today*, Mrinalini Sarabhai wishes it to be made clear that the assistance given her company by the Indian Government is in the nature of a remission of entertainment tax as a cultural enterprise, and is not a grant of money.

TELEVISION BALLET

By LISA GORDON SMITH

IT is, at the time of writing, just over six months since the first of the much publicised series of French Grand Ballet Recitals burst upon the television screen. And although that particular series gently faded away (partly through lack of material of the necessary standard) it not only provided several enjoyable and interesting programmes containing many episodes of great beauty but also served the useful purposes of making televiewers more balletically minded and of putting television-ballet firmly on the somewhat narrowly-bounded map of the purist balletomanes. These programmes also indicated "the shape of things to come" in this new medium for ballet (and a very worthwhile shape it seems to be) while themselves having been in as good shape as the circumstances permitted.

There were, inevitably, viewers who did not like this programme or that, for no producer in any form of entertainment can please all the people all the time. There were also viewers who wrote rude letters to producers and the press about the regrettableness of having to watch ballet at all—but as there were other viewers ready in their turn to curse the favourite programmes of the balletophobes, doubtless both ballet and television will continue to survive

Since Philip Bate's production of ballet for three (Fonteyn, Somes and Turner) reviewed in the last issue, there have been two programmes of importance. One, "Stars of the Ballet," produced by Michael Mills on June 20th, featuring Danilova, Massine, Franklin, and young Svetlana Beriosova of the Metropolitan Ballet, it was my misfortune to be unable to see, but from all the accounts given me by balletomanes and others, everyone danced magnificently and it was a thoroughly enjoyable programme.

The other, *Les Ballets Nègres* on June 8th, I did see and was frankly astonished, because I saw this company in one of the "little theatres" when they first performed in England, and found myself with no particular wish to see them again. Now it is apparent that the faults in stagecraft and insufficient adaptation of material which made their earlier performances almost embarrassing to watch have, in the intervening few years, greatly improved. A company which can progress to this extent will almost certainly progress further. The striking thing is that the added artificiality of correct staging and presentation which this company has acquired had the effect of making the dancing seem even more authentic, rather than less so, as one would expect. This is true artistry in theatrical presentation!

Televisionally, this programme was most successful. Eric Fawcett produced and showed a keen sense of the essential points of this somewhat unfamiliar style of dancing. In *Market Day*, with its unobtrusively excellent sets and lighting, the producer bravely eliminated all reference to the feet on many occasions and concentrated on the extraordinarily agile midriffs of the dancers. There is some quite definite abdominal choreography in the make-up of these ballets, which is as beautiful as it is amazing. In televised western ballet—and always excepting the *Wise Virgins* solo—I have never seen feet cut off, accidentally or intentionally, without feeling infuriated ; but in televising *Les Ballets Nègres* it was logical and effective, for there are considerable periods during which the dancers stand still—at any rate from the ankles down!—and the floor patterns are primitive and simple in the main and inclined to confusion when simplicity is abandoned. Eric Fawcett eliminated all possibility of boredom or frustration by keeping his pictorial pattern interesting throughout.

The choreographers' groupings were delightful and the dancers built up their characterisations with conviction. The Thief, stealing the purse from the dance-exhausted Market Girl, in particular portrayed with truth and humour the " dissembling " routine of the clever pick-pocket all the world over.

There was a musical interlude by the native orchestra which, apart from the interest of watching skilful hands, was of little entertainment value ; for these dance-invoking rhythms are, unlike Indian music, slightly boring to listen to, unless one is dancing or watching the dance.

They Came, the final ballet in this programme, contains some influences of classical ballet in the choreography for the Missionary and the Nurse which, though no more than adequately performed, was tastefully and logically incorporated into the whole.

The "message" of this ballet, namely, the struggle for supremacy between native magic and Western science, is put over with obvious sincerity but in a somewhat outmoded and sentimental manner. However, the performance of the Witch Doctor is so magnificent as to compensate for the fact that little else in the ballet is of lasting theatrical or artistic importance.

I shall await the next opportunity of seeing *Les Ballets Nègres* on the stage with considerable interest, and Eric Fawcett's next teleballet with no less.

On July 4th Philip Bate produced the first of two programmes of great originality and of particular value to viewers who are comparatively new to ballet. Entitled "Ballet for Beginners," the telecast was designed to introduce the technique of ballet, giving many illustrations on the subject of its building up and the causes and reasons thereof.

B.B.C. photograph

"DESIGNS WITH STRINGS" TELEVISED BY THE METROPOLITAN BALLET EARLY THIS YEAR, WITH ERIC HYRST, SVETLANA BERIOSOVA AND FRANK SCHAUFUSS

David Paltenghi's explanatory commentary combined information and informality to perfection, and the programme, devoted to the technique of the legs and feet, covered a lot of ground with the maximum of efficiency in the space of forty minutes, the explanations and demonstrations being liberally interspersed with excerpts from the classics. Faces—and personalities—were purposely subdued, but there was no disguising the elegant footwork of Domini Callaghan and Michel de Lutry of the Metropolitan Ballet, the lovely line and placing of Peggy Sager and the authoritative partnering of Guy Massey.

The second of these programmes, to be devoted to the arms, head and body, will take place on July 18th, unfortunately too late for inclusion in this review, but the contemplation of these useful and interesting programmes leads one to hope that they may be extended to include many more aspects of the classical ballet technique, such as the "works" of *pas de deux* and even of choreography, for these two programmes cannot fail to stimulate viewers' interest in future ballet productions.

BALLET RAMBERT

The King's Theatre, Hammersmith, taken over by Sir Laurence Olivier, will re-open shortly and a fortnight's season of the full company of the Ballet Rambert will begin on October 17th. Nathalia Krassovska and, it is hoped, Vladimir Skouratoff will appear as guest artists.

THE WOMAN'S PLACE

By GORDON SYMES

AN aura of the unmanly still clings about the ballet in this country. The newcomer to ballet—and especially the male of this species—will almost certainly approach it with the conviction that ballet is an occupation, and an entertainment, solely for women. To drag a Plain Man to the ballet is even harder than getting him to a concert or an art gallery.

Our well-known national prejudice against male dancers reflects the same feeling. There is really something rather ironical about all this. For the Romantic legend of nineteenth century ballet—both on stage (the myth of the fatal enchantress) and off it (the champagne-slipper tradition)—was an almost exclusively masculine conception. And it was the Romantic ballet which more or less drove the male dancer off the boards towards the end of the century in both Britain and France.

The Romantic cult of woman, which reached its height in the ballets of about a hundred years ago, is well attested by Gautier. Traces of it survive also in the charming coloured lithographs of the period—those airy temptresses with skirts like mist, impossible waists and feet tapered like arrows. Taglioni's *Sylphide* not only established a formula for ballet (mortal male bewitched by supernatural female) but standardised an appropriate costume for her kind. This era, moreover, made first use of what is now a commonplace of ballet : dancing *sur les pointes*. There was obviously something very suitable to the romantic illusion of gliding through space in this new, exclusively feminine device. There is also additional irony in the fact that it seems to owe something to the folk-dances of the Georgian Cossacks, whose *menfolk* were able to perform on the tips of their toes unsupported. (In Lichine's *Fair at Sorochinsk* the Red Devil of the folk-tale spends most of his time "on the point".)

From this time, the male function in ballet became less and less important. Dramatically necessary at first to the conception of woman as the ethereal charmer, the unattainable—for it is the very stuff of Romanticism that love should not be fulfilled—the man dwindled gradually to something very like a stooge. In the end he was even replaced altogether by female dancers in travesty. The part of Franz in *Coppélia* was originally danced by a woman.

This latter development rounds off a chapter of ballet with a sardonic twist. For in the first beginnings of professional ballet theatre in 17th century France, there were no women performers at all. Female parts were played by masked youths in wigs.

It need hardly be said that dancing, in its origins, was not the special prerogative of either sex. Men and women had equal contributions to make to the community ritual, though their parts almost certainly differed in physical impact and were not interchangeable. They must have been based on an instinctive sense of natural relationships, most of all in erotic dances. Traces of erotic naturalism can still be faintly discerned in the *grand pas de deux* of classical ballet, though academically refined almost out of existence.

All this helps to account for any feeling the unenlightened newcomer may have about the predominantly feminine nature of ballet. The student of twentieth-century ballet, however, may easily form the opposite opinion. For, if you think about it, ever since Diaghilev there has been quite a drastic change in what might be called the sex-ratio in ballet. Diaghilev was primarily concerned with leading Russian ballet out of its artistic *impasse* at the end of the last century—only secondarily with restoring the male dancer to his former importance. After all, Imperial Russia had never gone as far as France or Britain in dispossessing the wretched male, though he was not required by the Petipa code to do

MARGOT FONTEYN IN "THE WISE VIRGINS" SOLO TELEVISED ON MAY 10TH

B.B.C. photograph

much more than support the lady in her pyrotechnics (the ballerina's "third leg") or to provide a contrast in "character."

But it did so happen that many of the new ballets which Fokine created for Diaghilev were dominated by male dancers in a most spectacular fashion. An obvious example is *Prince Igor*, in which the leaps and dizzy turns of the Polovtsian Chief are still the most exciting male performance in ballet today. It is the entry of the male slaves (and particularly the Golden Slave) which brings *Schéhérezade* startlingly to life. And *Le Spectre de la Rose*, that otherwise faithful recreation of nineteenth century Romanticism, has this significant difference. *La* Sylphide has become *Le* Spectre. It is the woman's turn to be bewitched.

Perhaps it is not too fanciful to detect something of this masculine counter-revolution in *Petrouchka*, too. On the face of it, this ballet represents a puppet's struggle to develop an embryonic soul. But might not Petrouchka also stand, though more obscurely, for the degraded male dancer? At any rate, the doll with whom he falls in love (and she *is* a Dancer) is a posturing and characterless creature "on the points"—almost a parody of the nineteenth century ballet heroine

Throughout the Diaghilev regime, and after his death in 1929, ballet continued to show signs of a male bias or orientation. From the first Fokine ballets and Nijinsky's *Faun*, through the deeply dramatic characterisations of Massine, to such later creations as *Apollo* and *The Prodigal Son* (the titles speak for themselves) there is a decided tendency for male dancers to become, either technically or dramatically, the focal point of the new ballets. In hardly any of them is there a female part to compare in scale or theatrical impact with the roles of the previous era.

It is no answer to say that Diaghilev himself was a misogynist. Nor were all his choreographers men. There was Nijinska—but her topical interest in twentieth-century sports idiom was less likely to commend itself to women than to men dancers. *Le Train Bleu* was built round the very masculine acrobatics of Dolin, and even *Les Biches*—which she called the *Sylphides* of the 1920's—requires the young men to give it organic life. And it was not that Diaghilev had any shortage of good female dancers. Nijinsky could be matched with Karsavina; Massine and Lifar with Lopokova and Danilova. The thing to be remembered is that the women generally achieved their greatest successes in revivals of nineteenth century classics, for which Diaghilev, with all his flair for *l'avant-garde*, had a strong nostalgic predilection.

It is these period pieces which continue to provide our own girls with their best chances today. For this reason, anyone glancing through a catalogue of the Sadler's Wells *homegrown* ballets might be forgiven for supposing that this company has always been better off for men then for women dancers. The case, of course, is precisely the opposite. But it is the old classics in which, for instance, Beryl Grey and Moira Shearer have graduated. A promising boy, however, is likely to have a new ballet created for him.

Thus three of Ninette de Valois' best-known compositions (*Job*, *The Rake's Progress*, *The Prospect Before Us*) have outstanding male parts and very little to offer a ballerina. (Suggesting again, thereby, that the sex of the choreographer has nothing to do with it.) Helpmann's *Hamlet* and *Adam Zero* are dominated by their male characters. In *Miracle in the Gorbals*, the Official is a genuine and complex personality; the Prostitute is a familiar, novelettish and sentimental abstraction. "Sentimental abstraction," indeed, is a phrase which covers a good many feminine roles in modern ballet.

The work of Frederick Ashton fits such generalisations less easily, for much of it is in the "abstract" mode in which the sexes tend to be mixed in more natural proportions, as in *Symphonic Variations*. But in at least some others, there is a certain male preponderance. It is the virtuosity of the Boy in Blue which haunts longest our memories of *Les Patineurs*. The symbolic episodes of *The Wanderer*, the hallucinations of *Apparitions*, reach us, so to speak, through the miming of a central (male) figure. This is true, also, of Massine's *Symphonie Fantastique*.

It is perhaps worth noting, too, that some critics have discerned quite modern treatment in the psychology of the Ugly Sisters in his *Cinderella* (which seems otherwise to be an attempt to meet Petipa on his own ground). The Sisters are played by Ashton himself and Helpmann.

If it is true that recent trends in ballet, which have elements both of contemporary realism and psychoanalysis, tend to leave the ballerina behind, what is the reason for this? It surely cannot be that she is by physical and dramatic aptitude less suited for complex modern roles than for the over-simplified and idealised fictions of the nineteenth century. It is true that these, with the possible exception of Giselle, require no more than technique, personality and a tireless sense of "theatre"—which is quite enough to require of anyone. But this, presumably, is no more than a historical accident. It is hard to believe that women dancers are actually deficient in histrionic range and subtlety—if anything, they are the victims of a masculine culture which created the romantic concept of woman in ballet more than a century ago and still demands of her the exclusive qualities of charm, grace and poise.

There are exceptions to every generalisation and by now readers will have thought up their own. There are two, in fact, which do rather more than prove the rule. *Lady Into Fox* requires a highly complex and unconventional rendering from the Lady, who must effect her strange metamorphosis without lapsing into farce or

fantasy and must hover poignantly between an animal craving for freedom and her still-warm affection for her husband. In America, Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire*, which is something like a Freudian case-history in dance terms, gives Nora Kaye the opportunity for a remarkable study of neurosis, at once shameful and tender.

These ballets justify the feeling that the female dancer, without sacrificing any of her technical prerogatives, is capable of a good deal more depth and variety of characterisation than she is generally being given credit for. They may also be signs that the masculine counter-revolution has now gone far enough.

BALLET IN PORTUGAL

By GEENO GARR

AMATEUR dancers and ballet mad girls and boys have a Mecca in Portugal; it is called the "Circulo Iniciação Coreografica" (Club for the Initiation to Choreography) known briefly as the C.I.C. and was founded in 1944 by Senhora Margarida de Abreu who is still its sole director, ballet mistress and choreographer.

Half-Swiss, Senhora Margarida studied in Switzerland and Austria with Jacques Dalcroze and, later on, in Paris with Olga Preobrajenska. Since then every summer she pays a visit to Paris and London to study, practise and learn. Last summer she sent two of her most promising pupils, Anna Maria Mascolo and Fernando Lima, to work under the supervision of Preobrajenska in Paris, and the effect of good schooling was felt not only by these two dancers but, on their return to Lisbon, was transmitted by them to their fellow students.

After having opened a private dancing school in Lisbon, frequented by the daughters of the best families, Senhora Margarida was called to teach at the local Conservatoire where there is a three years' course of dancing. I received snatches of information about the C.I.C. while its founder was resting between rehearsals and classes having, in this way, an opportunity to see this frail-looking, fair little woman at work displaying an unknown amount of energy in order to control and teach her pupils of all ages from little tots to ladies learning deportment and would-be ballerinas.

Senhora Margarida told me that it was the necessity of giving an outlet to her best pupils that inspired her to found the C.I.C. which in the last few years has come to count for something in the cultural life of Lisbon. "I have at present about twenty girls and eight men, some of them soloists of promise. The chosen one, when admitted in the C.I.C., must sign an agreement to attend regularly the classes and rehearsals and to take part in the performances I organise. After having completed their course at the Lisbon Conservatoire or at my private school, if I consider them promising enough I invite them to join the C.I.C. . . . I divide them into disciples and soloists, and these latter, when they take part in public performances, receive what amounts in practice to pin money. The finances of the C.I.C. don't allow luxuries and the 'soloists' just dance in the ensemble when there is a need for it. Of course it is my earnest wish to transform the group into a professional company as soon as circumstances permit."

When one looks at this little lady one wonders how she found the courage, the energy, the persistence to fight for so long and to surmount all obstacles and succeed in keeping the C.I.C. alive for so many years, buying scenery and costumes and organising performances and recitals. Senhora Margarida tells me: "Of course, the dancing members of the C.I.C. are not professionals in the strict sense of the word, but enthusiasts of the ballet. Stress is put on general and artistic education and on social standing and many of the members have a high school and university education or are already working in business. For these reasons classes and rehearsals have to take place in the late afternoon and evening and at weekends."

The activities of the C.I.C. since its foundation comprise three seasons of ballet at the S. Carlos Theatre in Lisbon and providing the *corp de ballet* for three seasons of opera at the same theatre; various lectures and recitals to explain and illustrate the aims of the group, and a season at the Lisbon Coliseum (6,000 seats) which was a financial and a popular success. Senhora Abreu has published two books, in Portuguese and English, about her efforts to introduce ballet in Lisbon.

The members of the C.I.C. have tried their hands (or I should say their feet) to such ballets as Stravinsky's *Firebird* and Mussogrsky's *Pictures in an Exhibition* and various other ballets and divertissements to music by Chopin, Portuguese composer Ruy Coelho, etc. An interesting experiment was made in *Tagides* (*The Nymphs of the River Tagus*) where, to music by Tchaikovsky, Britten and Bach the *corps de ballet* tried to express in terms of movements verses from the national poem *Lusiadas* by Portuguese classic poet Camöes, which were declaimed by actor Armando Cortêz. The same experiment (but without music) was made with the poem *The Wind* by Afonso Lopes Vieira, danced by Anna Maria Mascolo.

In its last spring season at the Lisbon S. Carlos Theatre the C.I.C. presented a *pas de deux* that Anna Maria

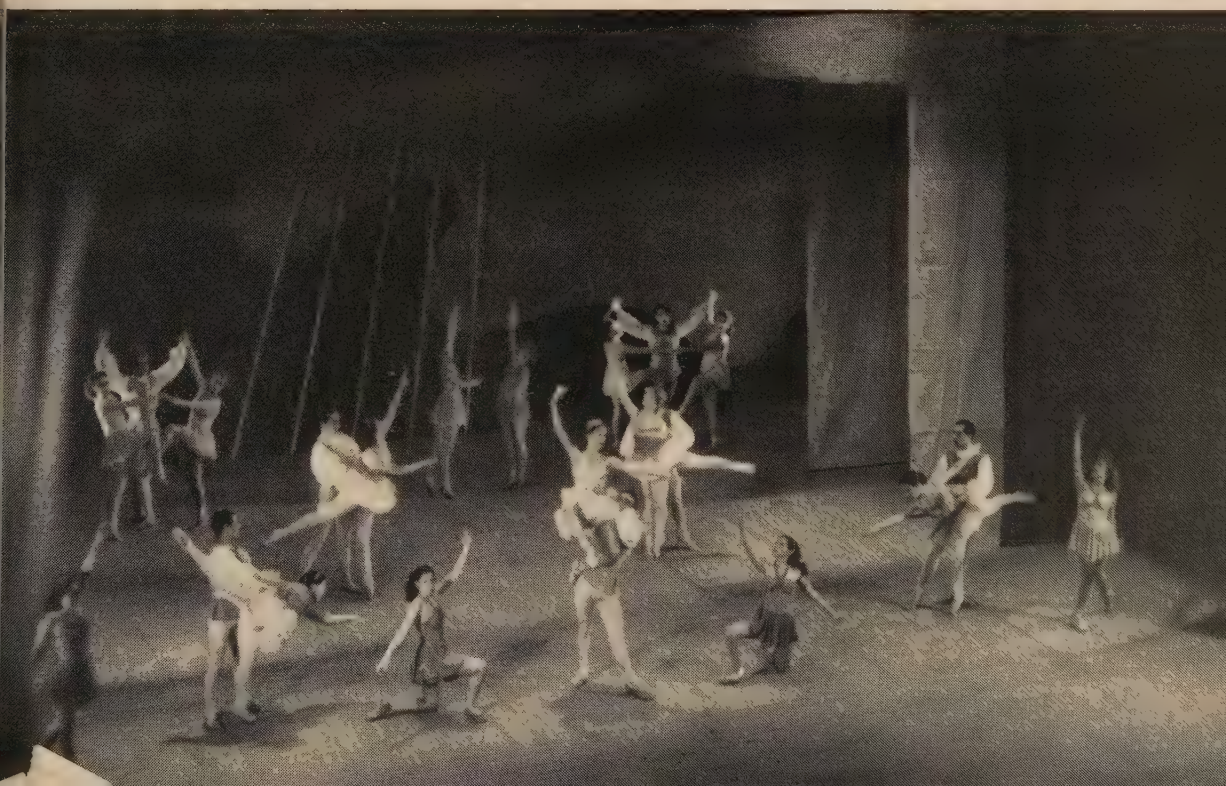
Mascolo and Fernando Lima practised last summer under the supervision of Preobrajenska in Paris, and two new ballets by Margarida de Abreu, *Polonaise Héroique* (Chopin) and *Schumann Concerto,* in which choreographer, dancers and designers had a good opportunity to show their worth. The Orquestra Sinfonica Nacional, the leading musical group in Portugal, is always used to accompany the ballet under the direction of Maestro Jaime Silva Filho, who has shown much patience, enthusiasm and ability in keeping the collaboration between dancers and the orchestra, and in the arranging and adapting of the scores.

Of course as there are no precedents everybody, including brilliant young painters Abilio Mattos and Almada Negreiros, responsible for the settings and costumes, is doing his or her best according to what they have learned and seen abroad or read about, and learning and perfecting themselves as they go, but the results have been far better than it could be expected and the enthusiasm of the executants and their evident joy in dancing compensate for many unavoidable imperfections. The activities of this Portuguese group well deserve to appear amongst the works of the best amateurs group of Western Europe and perhaps, if monetary needs can be overcome, they will appear this summer in some dancing festival.

The C.I.C. closed the 1948-49 season with the presentation at the Teatro Nacional of its own ballet school, about thirty little girls from which the group hopes to get its future dancers in two or three years' time, and with a season at the Coliseum Theatre.

For this occasion the Hungarian dancer, Paul Szilard, was signed as ballet master and choreographer for about three months; and with Bulgarian born Sonia Arova (lent by De Basil) he danced with the company as guest artist. Szilard presented a new ballet *Mefisto-Valse*, with music by Liszt and scenery and colourful costumes by Almada Negreiros, which was a great success. The story is clearly told by meaning of the dance, and the finale shocked but interested Lisbon audiences who were not expecting such sensual movements as are presented by the dancers when, under the influence of Mephisto, Faust, Marguerite and the rest leave their peasant costumes and go in for very exciting dancing. The group also presented their repertoire choreographed by Margarida de Abreu.

MEMBERS OF THE C.I.C. IN "SCHUMANN CONCERTO". (*Front row*) AMELIA MATA, FERNANDO LIMA AND LILLY NEVES, BERNARDETTE, ANNA MARIA MASCOLO AND JOÀO SALO, ISABEL AFFONSECA, BENTO JOSÉ DA CAMARA AND RUTH ARAGÀO, LOURDES CARVALHAL. (*Second row*) JOSÈ MAQUINÈ AND LUISA VICTORINO, ARMANDO CORTEZ AND AGUEDA SENA



"CINEBALLET"
An Outline and Recent Progress

By LEONARD BOUCHER

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Roger Manvell for his recent invention of the word "Cineballet" which neatly explains our project successfully to conjoin ballet and the film.

As we have seen in a few sequences of American musical films, dancing and the camera *can* be brought together successfully with correct construction and treatment. It is regrettable that ballet, to date, has never been "captured" by the camera, keeping all its essential qualities intact. Usually this failure has been due to the insistence on freezing screen ballet within the pretence of a proscenium arch, or going to the other extreme of having the ballerina suddenly projected through immense space and innumerable clouds. Often film producers have considered it necessary to include in dance sequences elaborate settings and other extravaganza regardless of story or the ballet. Continual cutting is always disastrous and trick shots frequently add to the amazement of it all!

There are many things in ballet which cannot be set down by definable laws and which are entirely matters of good or bad taste. In Cineballet trick shots would be bad taste. If we are going to say to a large new ballet audience "*This* is Real Ballet" then we must not cheat. We cannot ask such an audience to believe in ballet if it contains a number of technical stunts. Should certain shots be required *as part of the cineballet story* then such would be permissible providing the audience clearly understood what was and what was not the trick.

Certainly cineballet intends taking many advantages the camera and film studio offer—but not to the extent of stripping ballet of its natural laws, traditions and technical limitations.

The choreographic construction of cineballet is not, of course, tied to the eight positions of the stage; in this respect we do move a long way from theatre ballet but not, I am sure, in a detrimental direction.

Shooting technique, choreography, story possibilities, the whole procedure of production, will be entirely new —but the ballets created for this project will commence and finish as true and real Ballet.

As a dancer, choreographer and student of the film, studying this plan for some years in all departments of a film studio (a necessity for the cineballet choreographer), I am positive the screen can be the perfect medium for ballet, providing the film director works in complete co-operation with the choreographer and observes throughout the method and principles of cineballet as outlined here.

Naturally certain problems do face a project such as this, and such problems can only be overcome when film directors will stop thinking of dancing merely as a series, or a number of sections, of quick and slow movements which can be used in one way or another to suit the camera.

Cineballet is created for the camera. No sign of wings, or curtains, or orchestra pit and gallery audience —but all the colour, excitement, illusion, charm, beauty and fluidity of movement we have seen in the ballet theatre remain. The lack of flesh and blood dancers should no more hinder the enjoyment of cineballet than it does ordinary drama. Ballet dancing is—or should be—more than a physical presence. Often the characters concerned are meant to be fantasies, and we are never asked to believe that these are real people. What an advantage the camera has here! Certainly we shall never feel with cineballet the suspense of "Will the ballerina make her thirty-two *fouettés?*" Or "Will the *premier danseur* turn six or eight times?" Or "What if Madame So-and-So falls flat on her face?"—But is this dancing? Is this ballet? Is this so much to lose where so much is gained?

The screening of famous classical ballets such as *Giselle*, *Coppélia*, *Casse Noisette*, has been carefully considered, but not as ballet records. To make such ballets good cinema and keep them as real ballet (cineballet) a great deal of reconstruction is necessary. For the present, the new cineballet is a far happier plan.

A question facing this project today is "What form of production should cineballet be given?" The short documentary educational or children's film, running between ten and twenty minutes—or should stories be written around or leading up to the ballets, making full features of the usual length? Both plans have their advantages, and the latter is the commercial side of the question. However, I see no objection to additional stories providing they are simple, well written, related to the ballet (not necessarily to the ballet story) and do not overshadow the ballet. There are no plans to include back-stage dramas, although I still believe the true story of back-stage life would make an excellent film.

I am pleased to know that this project has as its followers a number of artists who have strong links with the Diaghilev era, and during recent discussions with Alexandra Danilova I learned that Hollywood is also thinking seriously of the possibilities of filming ballet—not in the calamitous style of *The Spectre of the Rose* and

The Unfinished Dance, etc. but nearer the plan of cineballet. Let us hope the British film industry will beat them to it; not with a great fanfare of trumpets or loud beating of drums, but as the natural progress of the ballet we know and love as an entertainment and an art.

It is interesting to discover after some meetings with film authorities that we are all agreed that *Ballet* has something to give to the *Cinema* in the sense that it eliminates dialogue and makes full use of its music. I believe that Theatre Ballet *needs* the Cinema, and all the new creative activity, new scope, and the many other demands cineballet will bring.

THE TRUTH ABOUT GISELLE

As told to JANET SINCLAIR

IT was a dirty night, cold and raining, and Henry Robinson himself couldn't have done better with thunder and lightning as I began to trudge home through the storm. Maybe it was because I had filled up with a couple of double whiskies before leaving the warmth and security of the "Huntsman's Comfort" that I did not realise until afterwards that I had never before noticed the existence of the little thatched cottage in the clearing at the centre of the wood, where I was half-considering taking shelter from the downpour when a wheezy cracked voice spoke from behind me to wish me "Good evening." Wheeling round sharply, I perceived an old crone sitting in the shelter of an oak tree, her shapeless hat over one eye, and her grey hair escaping from under it in a series of straggly wisps.

I returned her greeting and she smiled toothlessly at me and invited me to have a drink with her. After a momentary hesitation I sat down beside her and took a swig from the round-bellied bottle she produced from beneath her tattered cloak.

"Thank you," I said somewhat breathlessly as I returned the hell's-brew and the pungent spirit began an internal contest with the whisky I had previously consumed. "That's very potent—what is it? Some form of spirits, I presume?"

She looked vaguely at me. "Spirits have no form, young man," she replied, "let me tell you that. And I've known a good few in my time," with a reminiscent shake of the head. I must have looked puzzled, for she went on to explain. "Spirits of the air, I mean."

I fished an old Covent Garden programme out of my pocket and waved it at her. "You mean like—hic—this?" I enquired and she peered at it with rheumy eyes. "Oh, Giselle," she said. "How that takes me back. I knew her well."

"Hic," I said, astonished into silence.

"Yes, indeed," she said, shaking her head sadly. "Beautiful girl she was—there were some that hinted her parentage wasn't all it ought to be. Poor old Duc de Courland got blamed for a hell of a lot." She stared into the distance while I held my breath. The hiccoughs seemed to have stopped.

"And you really knew her—that sweet, pure, innocent creature?" I enquired with a gasp.

"Sweet, pure, innocent foot," she said.

The hiccoughs came back with a jerk. "I beg your pardon!" I murmured.

"She took in no end of people," said the old bird reflectively, "with that little baby face of hers. Of course, she was after him all the time, but no one saw it except Wilfrid."

"After who—whom—hic?" I enquired.

"Albrecht, of course," said the old crone. "She had her eye on him from the first time she saw him, poor lad. Of course, it wasn't her fault she was spoilt—her mum made a proper fool of her, dressing her up different from all the other girls and telling her 'No' when she meant 'Yes' in the end. The girl might have pulled it off too," said the hag stretching her legs out in front of her and settling herself more comfortably against the tree, "only she didn't know the chap was engaged all the time. Oh, she did well for herself with her goo-goo eyes every time he rode through the forest and pretending not to know him when he popped up incognito in lodgings next door. She thought she could catch him so she put herself out to be all he wanted, yes, and do all he wanted, too. She had a dreadful row with her chap——"

"Hic—hic—hic?" I said.

"Hilarion, that's right," said the old bandersnatch. "Steady chap he was—but not good enough for her, though there was talk enough about her and him before His Lordship happened along. Then of course the poor chap got the push—no more than dirt beneath her feet, couldn't even bear the sight of him, or so she said."

"Better fish to fry," I said, shaking my head sadly.

"She had an' all. Of course poor Hilarion played right into her hands exposing the Prince the way he did. Giselle was getting a bit desperate because there was still no murmur of wedding ring and trousseau and perhaps wishing she hadn't let Albrecht take so many liberties. She saw her chance for a real bit of drama when her ex-boy-friend popped up with the new flame's sword. 'Now I'll get him!' she thought. But she reckoned without Wilfrid. Wilfrid is the king-pin in this tale, you know. He was very fond of the Prince—everybody used to comment on how devoted they were, you hardly saw one without the other until Giselle

turned up—and he hated the thought of his pal getting caught by a cheap little fortune-hunter, specially when he had such a sweet pretty lady waiting for him at home, crying her eyes out, I daresay, because of tales kind friends had told her about her sweetheart and her father's love-child."

"She certainly was a striking young lady, Albrecht's fiancée," I said, "hic."

"So Wilfrid thought it was time to bring matters to a head. He thought if Giselle saw the lovely elegant young thing she was up against she'd sheer off. But not her. Of course it was a bit of a shock when she saw the young lady's ring but after a second she saw the chance of a spot more acting. So she chucked herself about, and waved a sword around though she made pretty certain that Albrecht took it away before she'd done herself any damage, and then she fell down a great whack, and knocked herself unconscious on a stone. Of course *he* thought she was dead and my, how he did carry on! Cursing and swearing and blinding about. Nearly murdered that poor lad Hilarion."

"So what happened then?"

"They carried her indoors and when she came round she made her mother put it out that she was dead. Silly indulgent old besom did it, too. Then of course the girl had to make herself scarce so she popped off into the woods and joined the gang."

"Oh, dear. What gang?" I gasped.

"It was a good racket while it lasted," said the old bird shaking her head sadly. "A lot of us girls used to flour our faces and dress up in sheets and when some chap was going through the forest late on his way home from the local we'd leap out at him and frighten him into a fit and then pinch all his valuables."

"May I have another drink, please?" I said urgently and the old basilisk handed me the bottle.

"Of course it didn't always work out so well. Hilarion put it over us properly—he must have recognised some of the village girls and he rushed off towards the lake, and as four of them ran after him he stepped aside and tripped them right in. Sneezing for nights, they were. However, Giselle asked us if we'd put up a special act for her when Albrecht was coming to visit her supposed grave. She thought if she came back from the dead to save him from evil spirits that would clinch it. But she always was a bad psychologist."

"Why, what happened?" I enquired.

"He was so scared and upset he passed right out and when he came to he ran off home at the hell of a lick and got married and took the pledge the very next day," said the old bird.

"Well, well!" I said. "And what happened to Giselle?"

"She was last heard of reading palms with a crowd of gypsies down south. Though some said she went into partnership with Hilarion in Italy, calling themselves Odiglia and the Magician, doing some sort of impersonation act." She stared ruminatively in front of her for a moment and then suddenly said decisively, "I must be off, young man. Good night."

"Good night," I replied. "Oh—and—won't you tell me your name?"

Henry Robinson was at it again and the heavens seemed to split as the old bird grinned at me.

"Myrtha," she said. "Giddup!" and slapping her besom she rose in the air and flew away into the forest.

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The picture below shows *Ballet Today's* staff critic, Mary Clarke, at a party given for her on her arrival in New York in June. The contemplative gentleman behind her is Mr. Anatole Chujoy, editor of *Dance News*. Mary Clarke is now visiting the music and ballet festivals held in the United States during the summer, prior to returning to New York for the opening of the Sadler's Wells Ballet season at the Metropolitan Opera House

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